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## SHOULD SECONDARY SCHOOLS TEACH THE BIBLE?

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In the *Literary Digest* Professor W. L. Phelps of Yale is quoted as declaring that "the ignorance of college students of biblical literature is universal, profound, and complete." He states that he would refuse to allow any candidate to enter a university until he had satisfactorily passed an examination in the Bible—if he were on the committee for entrance examinations in English. More than that, he would have the authorized version the only book on the list. These statements rather imply that secular, rather than Sunday schools are at fault. He believes that secondary schools should teach the Bible on the grounds of its literary merits; because all teachers agree in this respect; because it would be an "enormous convenience to examination boards," "stop wrangling," and "remove the universal and disgraceful ignorance of the Bible among college under-graduates."

Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, of the University of North Carolina, is also quoted in the *Literary Digest* as disproving Professor Phelps's charge. He tested one hundred of his students on some of the simpler stories in the Bible, with overwhelming proof of Professor Phelps's ignorance of real conditions. On the contrary, he argues that the Bible is the only book of which the same number of students would have shown so much knowledge, and hints that any ignorance of it among college students is not an ignorance of facts, but of types, units, and relations.

To test this matter in secondary schools, I gave to ninety-six pupils, averaging eighteen years, ten quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, Browning, and Tennyson, believing that the knowledge of a fact is determined by a recognition of it in some application. The pupils were told to discuss as fully as possible the biblical allusions in the lines, as follows—

Or memorize another Golgotha,

—*Macbeth*, Act I, scene 2, 1, 40.

Here feel we but the penalty of Adam.

—*As You Like It*, Act I, scene 1, 1, 5.

. . . . the great King of Kings

Hath in the tables of his law commanded

That thou shalt do no murder.

—*King Richard III*, Act I, scene 4, 1, 200-202.

And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with thee useless.

—Sonnet, "On His Blindness."

I may assert eternal Providence

And justify the ways of God to men.

—*Paradise Lost*, Book I, 1, 25, 26.

Through this concession my full cup runs o'er.

—*The Ring and the Book*, Book IX, 1, 148.

How bloody Herod slew these innocents.

—*The Ring and the Book*, Book IX, 1, 136.

Follow Light and do the Right, for man can half control his doom—

Till you see the deathless angel seated in the vacant tomb.

—"Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After."

And from a heart as rough as Esau's hand.

—"Godiva."

Than that earth should stand at gaze, like Joshua's moon in Ajalon.

—"Locksley Hall."

The following statistics may be of interest. Judging from the appearance of the papers, only 14 had time to attempt all the questions. However, 3 answered all 10; 11 answered 9; 20 answered 7; 22 answered 6; 11 answered 4; 6 answered 2; 4 answered but 1; and 5 handed in blank papers. On a basis of 7 questions out of 10, 48 "passed," or gained 50 per cent. On a basis of 5 out of 7, probably a fairer ratio, 70 passed, or 73 per cent.

In regard to individual questions, the results naturally varied. On the first one, 36 knew what Golgotha was, and 34 of these discussed the matter in full. On the second, 64 knew their Genesis well; only 16 of these being somewhat incomplete. In regard to the Ten Commandments, 91 knew what the lines meant, but only 11 stated that the sixth one was referred to. Number 4 was answered by 58 pupils, 54 of whom told in full the story of the lord and the talents. The fifth was a puzzle, for only 14 expressed themselves in any way approaching the truth. The quotation may not be considered a fair one, for it is rather theological than biblical. The briefest and most inclusive answer given stated that it referred "to the offer of salvation to fallen man, and the destruction promised if that be refused."

On the sixth, 74 seemed to know their Psalms, and 58 of these definitely placed the reference in the twenty-third, in many instances quoting much of the passage. Number seven was discussed correctly by 81 pupils, 75 of whom went into some detail in regard to the cause of the slaughter, and the effects. For the most part, those who incorrectly answered the question confused Herod and Pharaoh, in their bloodthirsty proclivities. Number eight was discussed in rather a speculative way, but 52 gave reasonably correct answers, although half of them were somewhat vague. Many simply referred to the angel in Christ's tomb on resurrection morn; some applied it to each individual's resurrection connoting immortality; others discussed both these facts, and entered into a contrast of predestination and free will, as suggested by the first line. Only 36 answered correctly the ninth, and but 15 told in full the story of Jacob securing the blessing. The 14 who

attempted the tenth, answered it correctly, 10 of these telling the story of the battle and miracle in full.

This paper would not be complete without some reference to the literary museum which always results from an exercise of this kind. The following are a few choice specimens: "Death is a talent which no man can cast off;" "Adam was Eve's wife;" "We are to follow Christ's footsteps till the death *angle* summons us home;" "Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of porridge." True enough, many of the errors were the result of downright ignorance, but the great majority were unconscious slips. Taking into account the facts that the test was severe, that but forty minutes were allowed, no previous notification given, and that the high school in question is representative of average church and home conditions throughout the country, we should loudly deny Bible illiteracy among the younger generation.